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Helping faculty members work more efficiently by reducing digital file clutter

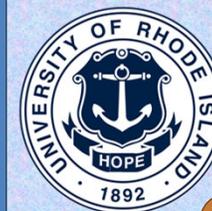
Melanie S. Brasher

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Helping faculty members work more efficiently by reducing digital file clutter

Melanie S. Brasher, PhD.

Department of Sociology and Anthropology



Why does digital organization matter?

Not being able to easily locate digital files can reduce efficiency, disturb peace of mind, and increase the risk of burnout

Without a strong system, it can be hard to locate files, especially if you are away from a project for a while. The time spent looking for files can add up – time wasted

Digital clutter can be distracting

Cathedral effect – our physical environment impacts our thoughts

Personal computers and the internet have not been around for all that long, and we are still in the early stages of figuring out the most productive ways for university faculty to work.

PARA system (Forte, 2022)		
		Examples for faculty
More actionable	Projects	Active projects with clear outcome and deadline
	Areas	Ongoing areas to maintain over time
	Resources	Topics I am interested in but don't directly connect to current project or area
Less actionable	Archive	Completed or inactive work

README FILE

Each folder and sub-folder will contain a "readme" file – description of what are the contents of the folder
Plain *.txt file

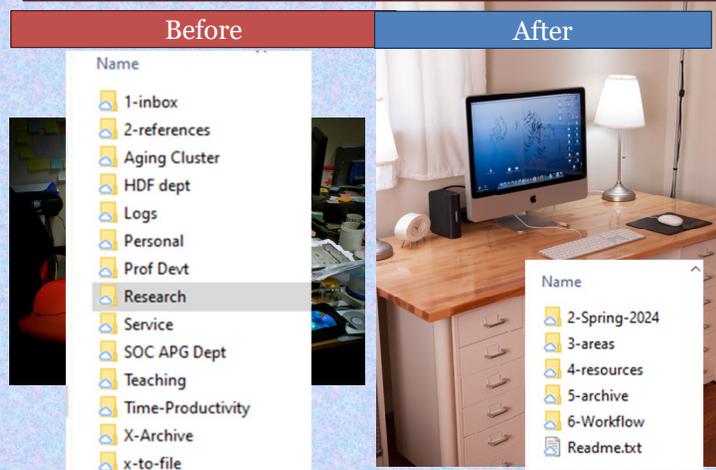
Benefits

Forces careful consideration of what goes into each folder
Get easily re-oriented after time away from project
Helps collaborators, new team members

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Original File Organization

Organized by job description – research, teaching, service
Before: 44,079 Files in 3,887 Folders. Now: 491 files in 66 folders (not including archive)



Discussion Questions

How do you currently organize files for yourself or for your team (collaborators)?

How did that system come about?

What challenges do you face?

What is working well for you? Are there any helpful tips you would like to share?

References List

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- Newport, C. (2021). *A world without email: Reimagining work in an age of communication overload*. Portfolio / Penguin.

Ideas for departments or committees

Organize departmental files using the PARA system +readme files

Maintain system as leadership/membership changes, help with institutional memory

This system helps groups clarify goals and deadlines (projects) vs. ongoing areas of responsibility.

Can help orient new members